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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 100-2/1-59

THE BERLIN CRISIS

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Reviewed by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

On 17 March 1959, concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations for Intelligence, Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; and the Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations, the Director of the National Security Agency, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation abstained, the subject being

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Date 7/9/93

HRP 93-3

SUBJECT: SNIE 100-2/1-59: THE BERLIN CRISIS

THE PROBLEM

To re-examine estimates made in SNIE 100-2-59, "Probable Soviet Courses of Action Regarding Berlin and Germany," 24 February 1959.

THE ESTIMATE

1. We have reviewed SNIE 100-2-59 of 24 February 1959 in the light of Soviet behavior and pronouncements on the Berlin and German problems since that date. In our opinion, the judgments made in that paper remain valid.¹
2. Soviet handling of the Berlin crisis in recent weeks has been marked by some increase in tactical flexibility. This has been evidenced by: a more apparent willingness not to regard 27 May as a fixed date for transferring access controls and other Soviet occupation rights to the GDR; the elaboration of the "free city" proposal to provide for "maintaining some sort of minimum number of troops" of the three powers plus the USSR in West Berlin and the offer of an East German guarantee of free access; and a willingness to participate in a foreign ministers' meeting. These variants on the original Soviet proposals fall within the range of tactical modifications which our previous estimate anticipated. We do not believe that they forecast any early willingness on the part of the Soviets to retreat from the more immediate objectives they have set themselves, i.e., enhancement of the prestige and international status of the GDR, removal of effective Western political authority and military presence from West Berlin, and making all movement in and out of the city subject to the control of the GDR authorities.
3. This apparent flexibility of approach probably reflects a Soviet determination to insure that the channel of negotiation is kept open for a resolution of the crisis favorable to the USSR. Khrushchev apparently now believes that, by removing the ultimatum-like character of the original Soviet demands, he can induce the West to accept negotiations which will result in achievement of important Soviet objectives, both in Berlin and in Germany as a whole. He probably also still believes that, if negotiations do not win Western concurrence to a fundamental change in the status of Berlin, a unilateral turnover of access controls to the GDR will not necessarily lead to a military involvement. As things now stand, Khrushchev is probably not convinced that the Western Powers will resort to local military action, and he will remain most difficult to convince that they will risk general war, over the transfer of access controls.
4. Despite agreement to a ministers' meeting, Khrushchev still prefers to resolve the present crisis at the summit level. However, Moscow's note of 2 March suggests that the level of negotiation is less important to the USSR than the subject matter of the discussions, and that the

¹ Attention is called to the footnote of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, recorded on page 6 of SNIE 100-2-59.

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Soviets wish to engage the West in negotiations which would deal with Berlin and a peace treaty but not with reunification. They probably expect the West to answer the 2 March note with counterproposals on the terms of a foreign ministers' conference. However, if a foreign ministers' conference fails to take place, or fails to reach agreement acceptable to the Soviets, they will almost certainly revert to their demand for an immediate summit conference. While the Soviets will probably be willing to accept a slightly more elastic agenda formula than that now offered by them for either a foreign ministers' or summit conference, it is unlikely that they will yield in their opposition to negotiations on German reunification by states other than the "two Germanies."

5. We continue to believe that, so long as negotiations which seem promising to the Soviets were under way or in prospect, they would postpone turning over West Berlin access controls to the GDR. The conspicuous preparations to remove Soviet elements from East Berlin, indications that a separate peace treaty with the GDR is in preparation, and statements that such a treaty would terminate the occupation status of all Berlin, are intended at this time to bring pressure on the West to negotiate on Soviet terms. Nevertheless, the USSR will soon be in a position to terminate its occupation of East Berlin and could at any time give the GDR control of the access routes to West Berlin, even without a peace treaty. Should negotiations not take place, or should they appear likely to end in deadlock, the USSR will almost certainly turn over access controls in some form, most likely in conjunction with a separate peace treaty. However, the Soviets have probably not yet decided how they would allow the GDR to exercise control, or whether and to what extent the GDR should attempt to restrict access. These decisions would depend on future Soviet estimates concerning probable Western reactions, especially with respect to the use of force. If the Communists did at some point attempt to restrict access, they would probably be careful to do so gradually and in such

a manner that any Western resort to force would appear to be an extreme reaction to a merely procedural issue.

6. Full-scale Soviet propaganda pressure on the Berlin issue will continue prior to and during any negotiations which may take place. The objectives are clearly to prevent the Western Powers from taking a firm and united stand, and to obscure for world opinion generally the aggressive character of the Soviet initiative on Berlin. A principal thrust of Soviet propaganda seems now to be directed at the Adenauer government in the hope of isolating it from its Western allies and of sapping its authority at home. The Soviets probably believe that a considerable body of Western opinion regards unification and, to a lesser extent even a free Berlin, as primarily German interests. This sentiment they probably consider as a vulnerable element in Western willingness to risk war in the present crisis. At the same time, the attacks on the Adenauer government highlight the Soviet purpose to use the crisis to disrupt the relationship between the Federal Republic and its NATO allies.

7. The Soviets must be aware that one of the key elements in the Western position is the firmness and confidence of the West Berlin population. The growing propaganda which seeks to represent that a change in the status of the city is inevitable is intended to undermine public morale there. Demonstrations and maneuvers of one sort or another may be undertaken to increase the pressure. Major harassment of civil traffic between the city and West Germany could seriously affect the morale of the Berlin population in the absence of immediately effective countermeasures. However, we think it unlikely that such harassment would be attempted pending the outcome of negotiations, because such action would make less credible the pledges of free access now being offered under the "free city" proposal and would tend to solidify the Western allies. There would be greater likelihood of interference with civil traffic if the Soviets were to transfer controls on Allied access to the GDR.

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8. The Berlin population seems in the main to be steady, although manifestations of uneasiness in certain quarters are reported. We do not now foresee any panic reactions or any important decline in economic activity. Nevertheless, barring some new US action or initiative, there will probably be a tendency with

the passage of time for past Western statements of support for a free Berlin to lose something of their effect. In these circumstances, a decline in public morale in West Berlin could become a factor of importance affecting the strength of the Western position in confronting the Soviets on the Berlin issue.

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